



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

ROY COOPER • Governor

MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH • Secretary

SUSAN GALE PERRY • Chief Deputy Secretary

August 5, 2020

Dear Superintendents,

We know that many of you across our state are trying to find options for child care and remote learning facilities as school districts are reopening under either a Plan B (hybrid) or Plan C scenario (full remote learning). Local leaders in your communities are already familiar with many families' stories: parents are searching for a safe place for their children to engage in online learning during the typical school day while they are at work.

In North Carolina, any setting where children receive care where they do not reside is governed by federal law (which sets minimum health and safety requirements), state law (which further defines health, safety, program, and staff requirements), and state regulations. State law defines child care to be any program that serves 3 or more unrelated children and operates more than 4 hours a day. As the regulatory agency for licensed child care providers, the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has been exploring options for families who need child care during periods of remote learning for their school-aged children who are enrolled in public schools (ages 5 to 12).

- **Option 1 - Licensed Child Care:** NCDHHS has set up a child care hotline (1-888-600-1685) where families can call to get information about local options for infants through children age 12. The hotline is open Monday through Friday 8AM to 5PM. When families call the hotline, child care referral specialists will provide referrals to licensed child care programs that are open and have vacancies for the age of the child(ren) for whom care is being requested. As of the beginning of August, there are currently about 30,000 slots available for school-age children in licensed child care across the state, but availability varies from community to community.
- **Option 2 - Remote Learning option at Public Schools:** Public schools across North Carolina have the option to provide a remote learning environment to school-age children on site in their public school buildings during periods of remote learning, overseen by support staff or a third party. Pursuant to NCGS 110-86(2), Public Schools are exempt from the definition of child care, and therefore exempt from licensure requirements. If public schools choose to provide a remote learning environment for students during the school day in public school buildings, this is considered to be public school and exempt from child care licensure. Similar to operating in-person instruction, schools choosing this option would be responsible for ensuring adequate staff and supports (including but not limited to meals and transportation) and manage any enrollment processes for families. Any care for school-age children provided in a public school building would be subject to the health and safety requirements of the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K – 12\)](#) guidance under Plan B.



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- **Option 3 - Remote Learning option at Community Based Organizations through contracts with Public Schools:** At this time, child care rules require that community-based organizations (e.g., Parks and Recreation programs, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, non-profits) have a license from the NCDHHS Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) in order to provide school-age child care. On August 5, 2020, DCDEE brought a rule-change recommendation to the Child Care Commission to allow public schools to enter into contractual agreements with community based organizations to establish Remote Learning Facilities for school-age children which would meet the definition of “Public Schools” under NCGS 110-86(2). Under this option, the remote learning supervision and support would be provided on-site at the community-based organization. The Child Care Commission has voted to adopt the emergency rules, and our expectation is that this rule change will become effective prior to August 17.

NCDHHS currently recommends that families call the NCDHHS child care hotline (1-888-600-1685) if they are seeking daily support for their children aged 12 or below, until other options are available to them locally. NCDHHS will also be sharing a parent-facing letter that superintendents can share with families who may need assistance locating child care options. Community based organizations should connect with their local school leaders if they are interested in providing child care and/or remote learning supports during the day.

Please reach out to your local education leaders, such as principals and superintendents, for questions about local plans for remote learning facilities and child care. If there are questions related to state policy regarding providing school-age child care for families impacted by the schedules of Plan B or Plan C in their district, please contact StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,

Susan Gale Perry

Chief Deputy Secretary, NCDHHS